

## Green Splash at MSU – Sport History

By Libby Kryskowski

### CHRONOLOGY

1920 – Women’s Lifesaving Corps of Mi Agricultural College founded to teach swimming and lifesaving techniques to coeds (UA 12.3.8)

1927 – Name change to Green Splash, established as a women’s honorary swimming club (UA 12.3.18)

1939 – Formation of Michigan State College Women’s Swim Team (swimming, diving, and synchronized swimming combined) (UA 1847 H)

1941 – MSC Women’s Swim Team eligible to compete at Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) meets (<http://www.usasynchro.org/about/history.htm>)

1946 – MSC officially joins the Big Ten; Swim Team can now compete at Big Ten meets (<http://archives.msu.edu/sportshistory.ppt>)

1952 – Four Detroit synchronized swimmers demonstrate at the 1952 Olympics in Helsinki (The State News, 5/4/52)

1953 – Green Splash begins holding annual water shows (UA 12.3.18)

1965 – Green Splash begins holding annual clinics for high school girls in Southeast Michigan (The State News, 12/19/65)

1998 – Name change to MSU Synchronized Swimming Club, dismantled after the loss of seniors (UA 12.3.18)

2004 – Club reemerges, begins competing (The State News, 10/19/04)

# DETROIT 'SYNCHRONETTES' TO SWIM IN I

By ELEANOR MASON

FOUR DETROIT mermaids soon will be on their way to Europe to demonstrate a young sport to that "old" world. Shirley Simpson, 18, of 10305 Mack; Connie Todoroff, 18, 2635 Fairview; Ellen Richard, 18, 2661 Benileau; and

Lauraine Stocking, 23, 4211 Chalmers; are St. Clair "Synchroettes," national AAU outdoor synchronized swimming champs.

\* \* \* They have been invited to Helsinki by the Federation Internationale de Natation Amateur to give an exhibi-

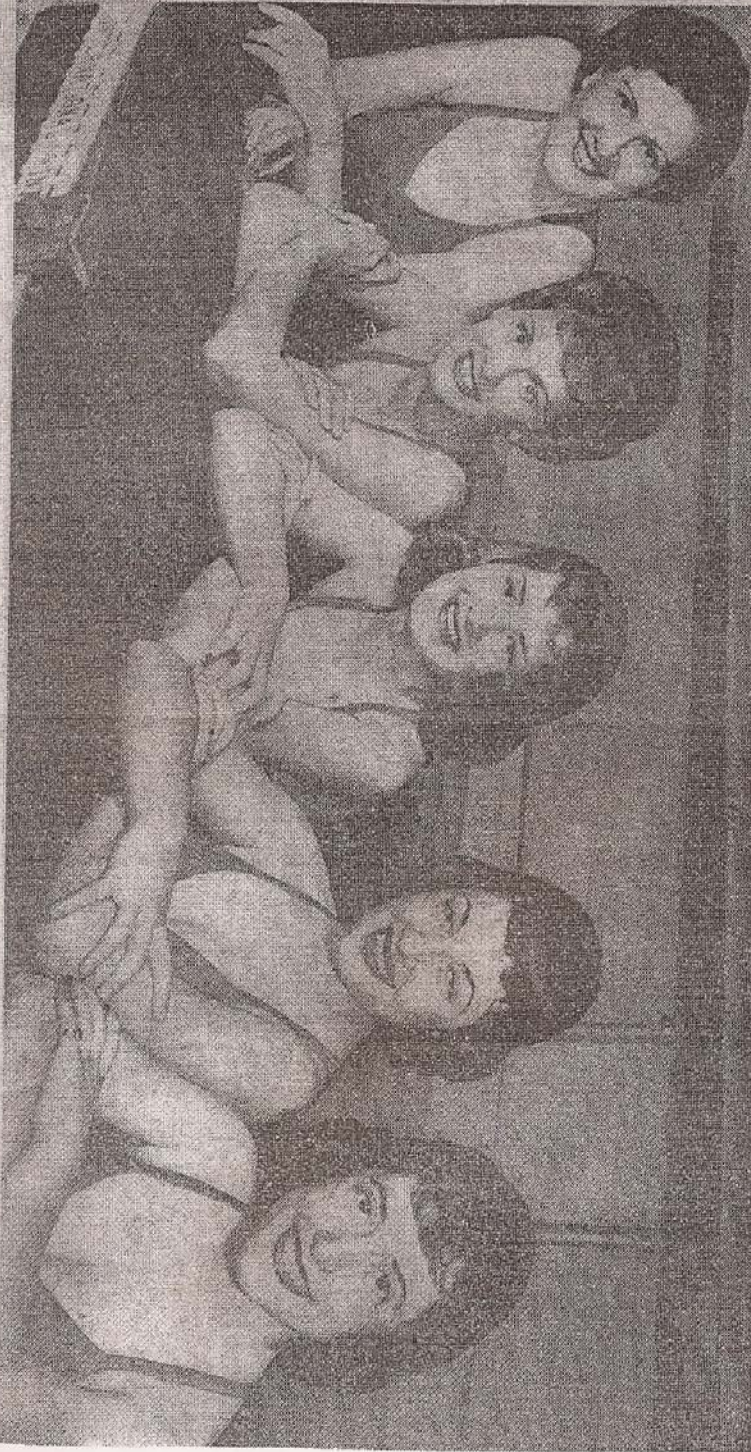
tion at the close of the Olympic games, Aug. 3. Much hinges on the demonstration for it will be the basis on which FINA decides whether or not to include synchronized swimming competition in future Olympics.

\* \* \* Sailing from New York July 1, the team will visit Sweden, Denmark, Holland and Germany, put on exhibitions for U.S. Army personnel and conduct clinics for swimmers interested in synchronized swimming.

Those four "water babies" are actually veterans of this fast-growing amateur sport, having started at the ages of 12 or 13 at St. Clair Recreation Center of the Detroit Department of Parks and Recreation under the coaching of Rose Watson and of Mrs. Ray De-

visor of the DPR's ring program. \* \* \* The Synchroettes have been instrumental in its spread. An exhibit in South America recently resulted in acceptance of synchronized swimming competition in the next Pan-American games. \* \* \*

The young Detroiters



Synchronized swimming champs, left to right: Rose Watson, coach; Lauraine Stocking, Shirley Simpson, Connie Todoroff and Ellen Richard.

B. This event in Synchronized Swimming history marks the beginning of consideration for Olympic recognition. It brought the sport worldwide recognition and many new audiences. Four Detroit swimmers (Shirley Simpson, Connie Todoroff, Ellen Richmond, and Laurraine Stocking) were asked to represent the United States and give an exhibition of synchronized swimming at the close of the 1952 Helsinki Olympic Games. The swimmers had recently swum in an exhibition in South America, which led to the acceptance of synchronized swimming in the next Pan-American Games.

Naturally, the next step for the sport was to gain official recognition and an induction into the Olympic Games. The purpose of the U.S. and Canadian demonstrations of synchronized swimming at the Helsinki Olympics was for the Federation Internationale de Natation (FINA) to examine the sport and decide whether or not to include it in future Olympic competitions. However, the four Detroit swimmers and the swimmers that represented Canada were unable to convince FINA to recognize synchronized swimming at the Olympic level. Synchronized Swimming was not introduced as an official sport at the Olympics Games until 1984, with the introduction of the solo and duet competitions.

Even though its Olympic berth was initially unsuccessful, the event increased the popularity of synchronized swimming around the world, and especially on the campus of Michigan State College. The year following the 1952 Olympics, the Green Splash began to hold annual synchronized swimming shows, and the numbers of people that came to watch the shows would grow to pack the stands.



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When human judges were used to decide touches in a match, a fencer's reputation could play a role in whether he won or lost," Schmitter said. "Some judges knowing a fencer's reputation, would expect him to be good and would be biased from the start, especially if a relatively unknown man was fencing against him."

's rug-  
won-lost

The machine, however, plays no favorites and reports a touch unless two occur within 1/25 of a second.

A fencing match is "wired" according to the specific weapon used. "Weapons have different objectives and are fenced differently and the machine must be flexible," Schmitter explained.

In foil fighting, a metal "lamé" jacket covers the valid target area, and the sword has a spring-weighted point which rebounds when depressed with 500 grams pressure. A wire, connected to the point, runs down the blade to a connector under the guard.

From there the wire goes up the contestant's sleeve and connects with a wire on a reel which is connected to the machine. The reel adjusts as the fencers move up and down to give them full freedom of movement.

The machine, shaped like a box, has two lights on each side, one white and one colored with one side for each fencer. A white light means the sword touched

## Green Splash Holds Clinic For Prep Girls

Four hundred high school girls will attend a swimming clinic here Jan. 15, sponsored by Green Splash, the women's synchronized swimming honorary.

All high schools within a 100-mile radius have been invited to participate in the program. The girls will receive instruction in advanced swimming skills, choreography and costuming. Each school may also present its own routine for evaluation and criticism by Green Splash members.

During the rest of winter term, Green Splash will be planning and practicing for its annual spring water show. This year the show will be presented April 21-24.

Twelve new pledges were initiated into the club this fall. Tryouts will be held again early in winter term.

Officers for this year include: Lola Miller, president; Penny Pritchard, vice president; Karen Glore, secretary; and Joan Kennedy, treasurer. Miss Norma Stafford is the advisor for the group.

The introduction and formation of a local synchronized swimming clinic is another historic moment for the Green Splash at MSU. In order to support the growing sport of synchronized swimming and pass on the skills they have learned, a high school clinic is organized by the Green Splash so that they will receive instruction in advancing synchronized

swimming skills, choreography, and costuming. Over 400 girls attended from many different high schools within a hundred-mile radius from MSU.

The Green Splash began putting on annual synchronized swimming shows for entertainment, and the tradition continued every year until 1976. Each of the shows proved to be successful and popular among fans, so much of the emphasis for the high school clinics was on show preparation instead of what to do during a synchronized swimming competition. Published in December of 1965, the newspaper article mentioned the fact that the Green Splash would spend the rest of their five months preparing for the show – the biggest event of the year for the club.

Teaching various techniques and aspects of synchronized swimming to swimmers during a clinic was and still is essential to the sport's growth. Holding a clinic for high school girls was also a recruitment technique for the Green Splash; it helped to spark local interest in synchronized swimming and the club itself. Also, all of the Green Splash swimmers were responsible for the oversee of instruction because they have never had a coach. Though Norma Stafford was the group advisor during that time, the synchronized swimmers with veteran experience passed on their skills to the newer members of the Green Splash and of the sport. Despite their lack of a coach, two Green Splash swimmers were sent to the National Aquatic School every summer, paid for by proceeds of the water show. That way, club members were still able to learn new synchronized swimming skills and pass them onto high school girls every year.



State News 10-19-04

# Group members plunge into underwater acrobatic

## Synchronized swimmers contort, hold collective breath for activity

By Darrell Hughes  
The State News

The smell of chlorine filled the air as four bodies submerged below 12 feet of water. Performing with the elegance of mermaids, the skillful swimmers sent ripples of waves across a 25-yard pool.

In a little less than a minute, women in different bathing suits began to surface above the water with signs of relief and gasps for air following.

Immediately, goggles plopped off and the Green Splash swimmers complemented each other on their performances while constructively criticizing their movements that could potentially damage them in a competition.

"Synchronized swimming is easy after learning the basic rules," said Erin West, Green Splash swimmer and human biology sophomore. "It shows your flexibility."

Watching from the sidelines, West shouted advice to her teammates in the water.

"You're making too many bubbles, so you need to bring your hands to your side," West said.

The synchronized swimming team began in 1927 as a culmination of different MSU women's groups.

As the years passed, the team faded away, and the 2004 unit is part of a reemergence of the

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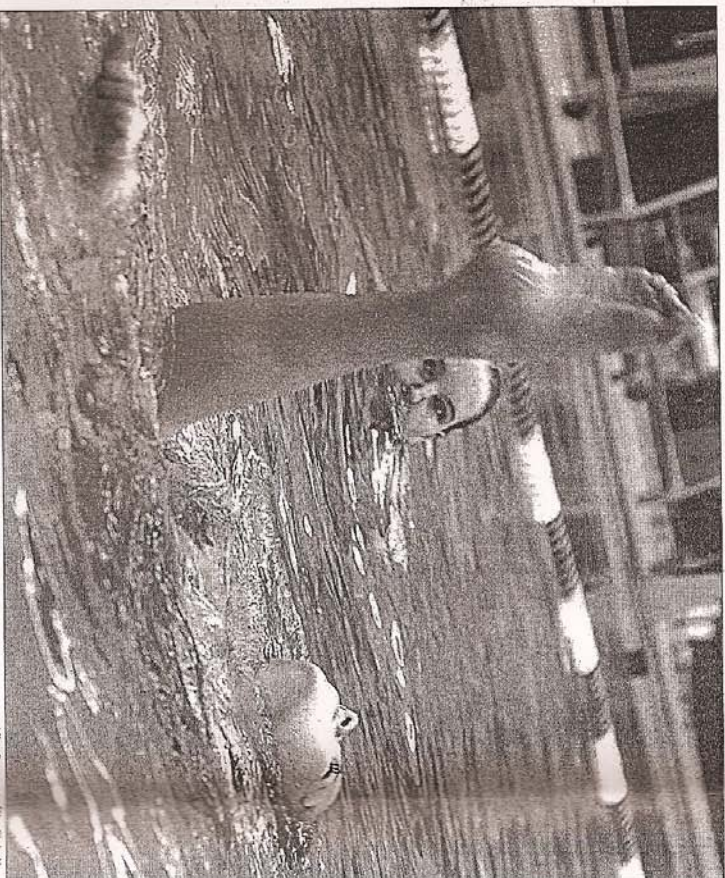
Erin West  
Green Splash swimmer and  
human biology sophomore

club — last year's team was the first to organize since 1998.

"Most of the people who ran the organization during that year (1998) were mostly seniors, which caused the team to disintegrate," said Katie Parfitt, a no-preference sophomore and Green Splash president.

Parfitt, who has swam since the age of 7, came to MSU expecting to join the Green Splash. After discovering the team fell apart, Parfitt decided to start one.

Parfitt placed flyers around campus, advertising the Green Splash comeback, a process very different from the original synchronized swimming guidelines. In the 1920s, students who were interested in joining the swim team had to be an undergraduate



Lisa Bergman/The State News

Education sophomore Melissa Hunt practices ballet leg under the tutelage of communication junior Jessica Trumbauer at the IM Sports Circle pool. Hunt had never tried synchronized swimming before attending this practice for Green Splash, MSU's synchronized swimming club.

ate student — specifically non-freshman — maintain a minimum grade-point average and pass a designated swim test. Although class standing and

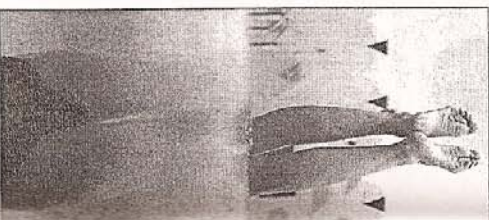
GPA's do not play a role in determining eligibility to join the team, members said some swimming experience can be beneficial.

"Our major goal is to have everyone on the team compete in regional synchro meets and, hopefully, nationals," West said. "We have to put ourselves out

there to let all the other sites know we exist."

Human biology freshman Elizabeth Berdantier said Splash teammates are learning from each other.

"These girls are their own little team," Berdantier said. "It's easy for them to take other's advice since they're water practicing together."



Lisa Bergman/The State News

International relations sophomore Jillian Tietjen practices the tuck in the IM Sports Circle pool. Tietjen is a member of Green MSU's synchronized swimming team, which meets at 8 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays in the IM Sports Circle pool.

The year 2004 was a pivotal one for the Green Splash. The club had temporary dismantled following the loss of many seniors. After a six-year hiatus, several synchronized swimmers were successful in reorganizing the club. Veteran synchronized swimmers wanted to continue synchronized swimming in college, and the reformation of the club provided an opportunity for new swimmers to learn about the sport and develop their skills.

Similar to the club's earlier years, the club reformed with the assistance of a coach. Just as before, veteran swimmers were responsible for teaching and critiquing the newer swimmers' synchronized swimming skills. However, the club reformed under different guidelines than in the past. Becoming a Green Splash member during the 1920's required the swimmer to be an undergraduate (specifically a non-freshman), pass a designated swim test, and maintain a minimum "C" grade-point average. Club members during that time were also limited to one cup of coffee per day, instructed to sleep for a minimum of eight hours per night, and were not allowed to smoke. The new rules during the club's reformation in 2004 allowed anyone who wished to join, regardless of class standing or GPA.

The newly reformed Green Splash also had a different attitude about synchronized swimming than in the past. Their primary focus was qualifying for and competing in regional and national competitions, rather than to serve as a show team. One of their goals was to let other universities know that they exist, and to make their debut on the competitive stage. However, as of 2008, the Green Splash is currently inactive. Perhaps someday soon another group of synchronized swimmers will become successful with another reformation of the club.

## Green Splash History and Main Transformations

The origin of the Green Splash synchronized swimming club has a rather interesting history. After the new gymnasium was completed in 1920, women were given use of the facility in the mornings. During that time, the American Red Cross Life Saving Corps was established in 1922. The goal of the organization was to promote knowledge of the principals of life-saving and swimming so that women would be able to act efficiently in the case of an emergency. Women were tested on a number of attributes before they could become members; their general swimming ability, strength, technique, and judgment. The Michigan Agricultural College was the first college in the nation to establish a life-saving corps for women.

Three years later, the Women's Athletic Association was formed and organized by Helen Grimes, who was the Director of the Department of Physical Education at the time. Members of the Women's Life Saving Corps also became members of the WAA. Like the life saving corps, the association also put their swimmers through a stringent amount of tests to become members. Women earned their way into the WAA by competing in a variety of sports, such as baseball, field hockey, soccer, basketball, and rifle. There were also strict training rules that had to be followed by all members: the athletes were required to sleep for at least eight hours per night, were not allowed to smoke, and were limited to only one cup of coffee per day. A minimum "C" grade-point average also had to be maintained.

The Green Splash was eventually established in 1927 as a culmination of both the Women's Life Saving Corps and the Women's Athletic Association. It was established as a women's honorary swimming club. The club was open to both men and women, but only women competed at invitationals. The Green Splash later became an intramural sports club, and eventually gained varsity status, competing in AAU and Big Ten meets.



Though members of the Green Splash who competed with the MSC Women's Swim Team had many athletic achievements, the primary focus of the Green Splash was the synchronized swimming demonstrations they put on for a variety of conventions, as well as the annual water show. During the 1940's the club put on demo shows at National and State Education Conventions, for soldiers at Fort Custer, and even for baseball player Percy Jones. The annual water shows ran from 1953-1976 and were organized around a common theme. Water shows were very popular among students and other fans, and the bleachers of the pool were frequently filled to its full capacity. They consisted of elaborate sets and costumes, as well as many guest performers. Members from both the men's and women's diving teams participated in the show, as well as baton-twirlers, tap-dancers, musical pantomimes, and even underwater skaters. The Green Splash did compete at AAU and Big Ten meets, but much of their popularity rested with the extravagant shows that they performed every year.

#### List of synchronized swimming shows from 1953-1976

- 1953 – Weather Vanities
- 1954 – Greatest Splash On Earth
- 1957 – Splashlight on Sports
- 1962 – Musical Sellouts
- 1965 – It's a Great Country
- 1966 – Sounds of Music
- 1968 – Synchronized Sit-Down
- 1970 – Great Shakes
- 1971 – Wet and Wild
- 1974 – Sea the USA
- 1976 – The Children's Hour